

VZCZCXRO2622
PP RUEHGR
DE RUEHWN #0978/01 1591838
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081838Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2658
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1449
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0071
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRIDGETOWN 000978

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [CU](#) [XL](#)

SUBJECT: CUBAN-EASTERN CARIBBEAN LOVE AFFAIR CONTINUES

1. (SBU) Summary: Cuba and the Eastern Caribbean continued their very public romance in May. The St. Lucia Prime Minister traveled to Havana and returned with a pledge from Cuba to train 300 St. Lucian nurses, while his Government praised the "wonders" of Cuba's eye care assistance program. Dominica and St. Vincent saw the opening of Cuban embassies and hosted Cuban delegations to discuss the various forms of aid Havana provides to what are the two poorest countries in the Eastern Caribbean. In Grenada, meanwhile, the Prime Minister and other officials swiftly came to Cuba's defense when a newspaper dared to report allegations that Cuban medical personnel had sexually molested patients. In doing so, the Government officials took pains to point out the significant medical assistance Cuba provides Grenada. These developments indicate that Cuba's relationship with the Eastern Caribbean remains healthy, so long as the region continues to receive some form of Cuban largesse. End summary.

St. Lucia PM Visits Cuba

2. (U) St. Lucia Prime Minister Kenny Anthony traveled to Cuba in May, where he visited medical facilities and met with Caribbean students attending Cuban universities. During the trip, Anthony characterized his nation's ties with Cuba as being "not for sale" but based upon "profound respect and friendship." After the PM returned from his five-day visit, the Government of St. Lucia (GOSL) announced that Cuba would provide nursing training to 300 St. Lucians, which is intended to help St. Lucia overcome a shortage of nurses. As is true throughout the Caribbean, many local nurses have left the region for more lucrative employment elsewhere. The nursing students are expected to depart for Cuba in June to take an intensive three-month Spanish language program before beginning their two-year nursing course.

Cuba Performs Wonders

3. (U) The St. Lucia Government also released a statement in May praising Cuba's eye care assistance program, which "continues to perform wonders for St. Lucians of all walks of life." According to the GOSL, the program has treated 1,800 St. Lucians since it began in August 2005. St. Lucians continue to travel each month to Cuba for advanced eye care, with a group of 99 people having gone in May. The GOSL calculated that to date the Cuban program has provided the equivalent of a whopping US\$6.2 million in assistance to St.

Lucia. The Government also noted that St. Lucia's diplomatic representation in Cuba has been significantly upgraded over the past year and its former Consulate in Cuba is now a full-fledged Embassy.

Cuban Embassies and Aid

14. (U) Dominica and St. Vincent also opened embassies in Cuba during the past year, a gesture that was reciprocated in May when Cuba opened embassies on these small Caribbean islands. Officials in Dominica and St. Vincent also met with Cuban delegations that arrived for the biannual sessions of both countries' Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation with Cuba. The governments of Dominica and St. Vincent portrayed these meetings as opportunities to discuss current and future avenues of cooperation with Cuba. Considering, however, that neither Dominica nor St. Vincent has much to offer Cuba, these exchanges appear to have been simply a chance for the Cubans to discuss with local officials the aid being delivered to their countries.

St. Vincent-Cuban Compliments

15. (U) During a ceremony to mark the Cuban visit to St. Vincent, Foreign Minister Louis Straker called Cuba "a source of stability" for attempting to help eliminate poverty in the Caribbean. Straker also commented, "In the area of foreign affairs, we stand in support of the principles that Cuba stands for: non-interference in the area. Cuba has not been

BRIDGETOWN 00000978 002 OF 002

interfering in the affairs of countries in the Caribbean." The head of the Cuban delegation, Deputy Minister of Economic Collaboration and Investment Orlando Miguel, publicly thanked St. Vincent for voting in favor of Cuba's membership on the UN Human Rights Council.

Grenada PM Sticks Up for Cuba

16. (U) Grenada did not host a visit by a Cuban delegation in May, but the Government had an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to Cuba when Prime Minister Keith Mitchell and other officials criticized a local newspaper for publishing an article that alleged Cuban medical personnel working in Grenada may have sexually abused patients. The weekly paper, "Grenada Today," carried the story in its May 20 edition of a woman who alleged that she had been fondled by a Cuban doctor, later identified as actually being a nurse, before going into surgery at Grenada's main hospital. According to the paper, this was the second such allegation made against Cuban medical personnel in the past few months.

17. (U) The newspaper was roundly criticized by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and other officials for publishing unfounded allegations that could potentially harm Grenada's relationship with Cuba. In objecting to the report, all pointed to the substantial assistance Grenada receives from Havana. One Government minister called on supporters of the ruling New National Party to boycott the paper. In a statement, the Cuban Ambassador to Grenada called the report "anti-Cuban propaganda."

Comment

18. (SBU) These recent events involving Cuba and the Eastern Caribbean are demonstrative of Havana's relationship with the region. Cuba delivers what aid it can, considering its own economic troubles, while the small Eastern Caribbean nations,

eager to receive aid from any source, offer Cuba predictable praise and periodic votes at the UN and other international fora. The establishment of new Cuban embassies in Dominica and St. Vincent, which will likely serve to better coordinate Cuban aid, indicates a deepening of this relationship.

¶9. (SBU) On the other hand, the attacks leveled by the Grenada Prime Minister and other officials against a newspaper that dared to say something uncomplimentary about Cuban nationals suggests a level of insecurity about the basis of this relationship. Despite their co-location, the English-speaking, democratic nations in the Eastern Caribbean have little in common with communist Cuba. Even the Foreign Minister of left-leaning St. Vincent could offer only lukewarm praise for Cuban foreign policy by recognizing the principle of "non-interference." Regional leaders typically credit Cuban charity, but not its politics.

¶10. (SBU) Havana and the Eastern Caribbean engage in a very public sort of love affair that includes a fair amount of romanticization of Cuba and its revolutionary leader. Perhaps, however, underneath the warm embraces portrayed in endless photo ops, if one were to take away Cuba's assistance to its small island neighbors, their feelings for each other would actually be rather tepid.
KRAMER